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TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Eighteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE [illegible]th MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 13 September 1[illegible], at 4 p.m.

President: Mr. CASTELLANOS (Venezuela)

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The meeting was called to order at 4.40 p.m.

OTHER PARTICULAR MATTERS IN THE FIELD OF TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT (agenda item 6) (continued):

(c) PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF:

(i) SPECIAL MEASURES IN FAVOUR OF THE LEAST DEVELOPED AMONG THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (TD/B/681 and Add.1; TD/B/719; E/1978/36, parts I and II; TD/B/L.510) (continued)

1. Mr. JARAMILLO (Colombia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, introduced a draft resolution on special measures in favour of the least developed among the developing countries (TD/B/L.510).

(e) DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION AND MOBILIZATION OF PUBLIC OPINION (TD/B/716)

2. The PRESIDENT suggested that the Board should take note of the report by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD on the dissemination of information and mobilization of public opinion (TD/B/716).

3. It was so agreed.

MATTERS REQUIRING ACTION BY THE BOARD ARISING FROM OR RELATED TO REPORTS AND ACTIVITIES OF ITS SUBSIDIARY AND OTHER BODIES (agenda item 5) (continued):

(c) SHIPPING (TD/B/L.515)

4. The PRESIDENT recalled that the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, at the close of the Board's previous debate on the subject, had consulted the Secretaries-General of the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO) and of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions, whose views were summarized in document TD/B/L.497/Add.1. In the light of their opinions, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD had amended his proposals for an expansion of the terms of reference of the Committee on Shipping. The amended text was annexed to document TD/B/L.497/Add.1.

5. Mr. JARAMILLO (Colombia), introducing a draft resolution on the subject (TD/B/L.515) on behalf of the Group of 77, recalled that the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2090 (LXIII), had endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination to the effect that the activities of the United Nations should be considered as a coherent whole in which the primary responsibility for multimodal transport and containerization rested with UNCTAD. It was only logical therefore that it should fall to the Committee on Shipping to deal with those questions, and that would entail enlarging its terms of reference. UNCTAD's competence in matters of multimodal transport and containerization had been demonstrated by its constant participation in the intergovernmental preparatory work on the subject and in the activities of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Group on Container Standards for International Multimodal Transport.

6. The proposal by the Group of 77 had already been submitted to the Committee, which had referred it to the Board as the body empowered to give it instructions. To refer the draft terms of reference back to the Committee would thus be meaningless. The time had now come for the Trade and Development Board to comply with the decision taken by the Economic and Social Council and to invest the Committee on Shipping with the necessary authority in that field.

7. Documents TD/B/L.457 and Add.1, including the annex to the latter, were self-explanatory. The addendum to the Committee's terms of reference had been drafted in accordance with the decisions taken by the Trade and Development Board and after numerous and exhaustive consultations with all parties concerned. There was no reason therefore to postpone a decision. Following the recent informal consultations between the groups, in which the Group of 77 had demonstrated its willingness to entertain any constructive suggestion, it had agreed with Group B on certain improvements which could be made to the addendum and which had given rise to draft resolution TD/B/L.515.

8. Mr. [illegible] (Federal Republic of Germany), speaking on behalf of Group B, said that the Group had taken note of the new secretariat proposal to amend the terms of reference of the Committee on Shipping. He noted, however, that the written results of the consultations which had taken place with the specialized agencies concerned and the regional commissions had not yet been communicated to Governments. Group B appreciated the efforts made by Group D and the Group of 77 to improve the secretariat draft.

9. It went without saying that Group B respected Economic and Social Council decision 2038 (LXIII) to endorse the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination. Like the other groups, it considered that, within UNCTAD, the primary responsibility for the work on multimodal transport and containerization lay with the Committee on Shipping whenever a sea link was involved. Nevertheless, further work was necessary to clarify the relationship between the proposed extension of the responsibilities of the Committee on Shipping and the work of other United Nations organizations dealing with intermodal transport. Group B continued to believe that the proposed additions to the terms of reference should be considered by the Committee itself before the Board took a final decision on them. There was a need for experts in the Governments and the international bodies concerned to give their opinion, but that had not been possible because the secretariat proposal had arrived too late and further changes had been proposed since then.

10. Moreover, Group B did not think that there was any pressing reason to bypass a main committee of the Board on so important a question as the review of its terms of reference. The work of UNCTAD would not be delayed by referring the matter to the Committee. The Board had recently given two groups a special mandate to study the question of international multimodal transport, and the work was absorbing the attention of all the specialists available to member States. In view of those considerations, Group B hoped that further consultations would be held before the Board took a final decision.

11. Mr. EL SAYED (Qatar) said that he had represented the Group of 77 in the informal consultations which had taken place between the groups on the terms of reference of the Committee on Shipping. The Group of 77 and Group D had shown great flexibility with regard to the suggestions and amendments put forward, since they had regarded them as reflecting the spirit of Economic and Social Council resolution 2097 (LXIII). The matter had been discussed on innumerable occasions, and talks had been held with the intergovernmental bodies concerned and the regional commissions, all of which had given UNCTAD the signal to go ahead and take the necessary decisions.

12. Group D asserted that the documentation had arrived too late, but document TD/B/497/Add.1 had been available for more than a month. Consideration of the question had already been deferred several times, and it would be pointless to refer it to the Committee on Shipping, since the responsibility for taking a decision did not lie with the Committee but with the Board itself.

13. Mr. MARTINEZ DE CIANCHINI (Mexico) said that his delegation did not think that the question of shipping had been given the attention it merited in the United Nations and, in particular, in UNCTAD. That had become obvious since the end of negotiations on the Code of Conduct for Liner Conferences, which had not been ratified by the principal industrialized countries in which the shipping companies were located, including some countries which usually displayed a spirit of co-operation in other important areas associated with the establishment of the new international economic order.

14. It had been recognized, particularly in the Committee on Shipping, that no progress had taken place and that the situation with respect to the participation of the developing countries in shipping had even deteriorated. It should be appreciated that, when the Committee's terms of reference had been drawn up, the international community had not attached enough importance to other forms of transport, such as multimodal transport and containerization. Those forms now accounted for a large proportion of maritime transport, and an extension of the Committee's terms of reference was therefore justified. Moreover, the Economic and Social Council, in resolution 2097 (LXIII), had given UNCTAD the main responsibility within the United Nations system for multimodal transport and containers. Mexico was therefore in favour of the secretariat proposal (TD/B/L.497 and Add.1) and hoped that it would be adopted at the present session of the Board.

15. Mr. FALTIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), speaking on behalf of Group D, said that the Group considered, in principle, that the terms of reference of all UNCTAD bodies should be given a thorough examination with a view to their possible revision and that consultations should be arranged with the international organizations concerned. In the case of the terms of reference of the Committee on Shipping, Group D considered that the Board had sufficient information at its disposal to take a decision on the matter at the present session. He wished to emphasize once again that the Committee's functions in connexion with multimodal transport and containerization should not cover matters that fell within the competence of the regional commissions, ECOO, ICAO and other competent bodies. The Committee on Shipping was competent when a sea link was involved and when the other modes of transport supplemented maritime transport.

16. Mr. OSMAN (Somalia) said that he approved the draft addition to the terms of reference of the Committee on Shipping, and thought that the Trade and Development Board should take a decision in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2090 (LXIII). The decision should be taken at the current session, because it was clear that it would not involve additional research or studies. The various repercussions of any new delay would hold up the work for one or two years and the question was an extremely important one which ought to be settled at the earliest possible moment.

INSTITUTIONAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED MATTERS (agenda item 7) (continued):

(b) RATIONALIZATION OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE SECRETARIAT MACHINERY OF UNCTAD (TD/B/C.5/1 and Add.1, TD/B/L.247, TD/B/L.247/Add.1)

17. Mr. AIDARA (Guinea), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, introduced draft resolution TD/B/L.247, in which it was proposed that the Committee should decide to establish an ad hoc committee to consider the question of restructuring and rationalization of the permanent machinery of UNCTAD. He said that the proposal should not give rise to any difficulties since the smooth functioning of the organization was in the interest of all.

(c) DOCUMENTATION PROBLEMS AND THEIR EFFECT ON THE WORK PROGRAMME OF UNCTAD

18. Mr. DEMUSSO (Director, Division for Programme Support Services) recalled that during the first part of its seventeenth session, the President had undertaken informal consultations on the problem of documentation and submitted a report to the Board, which it had decided to note with appreciation and to annex to its report (A/32/15, vol. II, annex III). It had further decided to review the issue at its eighteenth session in the light of the action taken by the appropriate authorities and of developments that might have occurred in the intervening period. In his report, the President had identified three areas of responsibility: that of the Board members, that of the UNCTAD secretariat and that of the United Nations Office at Geneva. In each case he had proposed a number of measures to improve the situation.

19. It was clearly not for the secretariat to evaluate the extent to which the States members of the Board had followed the President's recommendation regarding their decisions on the scheduling of meetings, their requests for further studies or documents and their decisions on the provisional agendas for forthcoming meetings.

20. The UNCTAD secretariat, for its part, had taken the President's suggestions to heart. It had reviewed and rationalized a number of internal procedures, taken steps to ensure the prompt movement of documents from one unit to another and, in response to a wish expressed particularly by the Belgian delegation, had taken the initiative of publishing a daily list of UNCTAD documents distributed at the Palais des Nations showing the date of issue in each language. The UNCTAD secretariat had endeavoured above all to improve the planning of documentation and it had achieved some success with regard to volume: six months before the eighteenth session, it

87. With regard to the documentation for the fifth session of the Conference, the Group B countries urged the secretariat to spare no effort to distribute them in good time in all languages. It would perhaps be preferable to produce shorter reports which would be available in time rather than more detailed reports which arrived late in the capitals and could not be examined with due care. The Group B countries fully appreciated the secretariat's difficulties, but in order to make the fifth session of the conference a success, countries, both large and small, must be adequately prepared, and that took time.

88. Mr. HERBERT (France) thanked the Director of the Division for Programme Support Services for explaining so clearly the documentation problem, which called for serious thought. He congratulated the secretariat on the useful innovations it had made in the work of documentation. Nevertheless, further steps must be taken.

89. In the preparation of the documents for the fifth session of the Conference, the French delegation was particularly concerned with the problem of languages. The translation of documents during a session always gave rise to difficulties and there must be a sufficient number of interpreters and translators at Manila to ensure that the participants could work in acceptable conditions linguistically. The problem of the overloading of the English typing pool could be mitigated if more documents were drafted in other languages. It might be hoped that, through the dedication and foresight of the secretariat, the fifth session of the Conference would after all have complete documentation available in good time, but the long-term documentation problem must be seriously tackled at the current session of the Board with regard both to subject matter and to the financial implications of the proliferation of documents, and also at a fundamental level which had emerged quite clearly from the statement of the Director of the Division for Programme Support Services: that of the responsibility of member States with regard to the calendar of meetings. The experience of recent years showed that progress could not be made by having more meetings at shorter intervals: on the contrary, what was required was documents distributed in good time and sufficient intervals for reflection between one meeting and the next.

90. His delegation greatly hoped that, in considering the calendar of meetings, member States would request the Secretary-General of UNCTAD himself to warn them against their own impatience and remind them that it was better to have fewer productive meetings than too many meetings which had been inadequately prepared. That would be a way of drawing a really useful lesson from the experience of past years and of allowing UNCTAD to work at an efficient and reasonable pace.

91. Mr. LALOUX (Belgium) welcomed the initiative taken by the secretariat in publishing a daily list of the documents distributed by UNCTAD. He had long been expecting the note of alarm which the Director of Programme Support Services had just sounded. The sovereignty of member States in no way prevented the secretariat from giving them a frank warning, while remaining strictly neutral, that they were approaching the danger point and that the proliferation of meetings

could not go on indefinitely. The Belgian delegation had, however, sometimes had the impression that the secretariat was somewhat accommodating with regard to requests for new meetings, and that far from curbing them it in fact encouraged them. One solution, of course, was to ask for additional financial resources, but that was the easy way out and he would wish to be sure that the resources available to the secretariat were being used to the best advantage before deciding whether the increasing number of meetings actually required an increase in secretariat staff.

77. Mr. ALVES (Ethiopia) said that, now that the UNCTAD secretariat had explained its difficulties to the Board, the Board should not merely express its appreciation of the efforts made by the secretariat, but should initiate remedial action. Member States ought to consider rationalizing future meetings and rectifying the lack of co-ordination in decision-making and at the technical level.

78. If the Board decided to set up an ad hoc committee to consider the question of restructuring and rationalizing UNCTAD's permanent machinery, the important views expressed by the Director of Programme Support Services could be considered by that committee. In any event, member States and the secretariat should work together to improve UNCTAD's working methods and make them more effective and fruitful.

79. Mr. BRILLANTES (Philippines) emphasized the indispensability of documentation. In his opinion, the volume of UNCTAD's documentation was reasonable: the secretariat tried to be brief without sacrificing what was important.

80. The Director of Programme Support Services had remarked that the organization's "English" capacity had not been made with the expansion of its activities. If that was the case, in other words if it was a question of inadequate resources, he wondered whether the rationalization of the UNCTAD secretariat had put the issue before the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly and before the Consultative Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (CCAAQ). If it had not, if there had been no follow-up, the fault did not lie with the secretariat, but with the member States of the United Nations represented in those two bodies.

81. Referring to the suggestion made by the representative of France that more documents should be drafted in languages other than English in order to relieve the English typing pool, he pointed out that that was not a proper remedy, but a palliative.

82. Expressing concern that the documents required for the fifth session of the conference should be prepared, reproduced and distributed in time, he suggested that an urgent communication should be sent by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, drawing his attention to the serious difficulties which the UNCTAD secretariat was facing in respect of documentation. The President of the Board should consult the Secretary-General of UNCTAD to see how best to draw the attention of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and, if necessary, that of the CCAAQ and the Fifth Committee to the problem.

58. Furthermore, he wondered whether the fact that many bodies whose headquarters were not in Geneva chose to hold their meetings at the United Nations Office at Geneva, thereby increasing the volume of work of the secretariat, had any repercussions on the preparation of documents for UNCTAD and its subsidiary bodies. If so, would it not be possible to make discreet representations to the bodies in question, to dissuade them from meeting in Geneva?

59. Mr. AL-HADITHY (Saudi Arabia), supported by Mr. GHAI (Egypt), stated that the problem of the Arabic language constantly arose in UNCTAD. The Arabic documents frequently came out after the conferences to which they relate. His delegation requested that the Arabic language should be treated on an equal footing with the other languages and that any improvements which could be made to the documentation in other languages should also be made for Arabic.

60. Mr. HEISSER (United States) said he shared the concern expressed by many delegations concerning the distribution of documents in good time in the various working languages.

61. While it in no way detracted from the seriousness of the documentation problem, the late appearance of documents was not always a negative factor and could be considered as having a positive function from the diplomatic point of view. It served as a justification for governments when they had not been able to formulate their positions before attending a conference, and it could not be denied that if delegates had all the documents in time they might sometimes find themselves in embarrassing situations.

62. In any event, documentation was by no means the only area in which improvements were called for. Nevertheless member States could join together with the secretariat in trying to provide delegations and the organization with the information they needed to make their decisions.

63. Mr. HAMILTON (Ireland) also expressed the wish that the documents should be distributed in good time in all working languages. The success of conferences did not depend only on the plenary bodies and formal meetings, and decisions were often worked out in closed meetings. Unfortunately, at the United Nations Office at Geneva, it was often impossible to have the documents for closed meetings in the various working languages, and many delegations were therefore prevented from taking an active part in the discussions. In order that all conferences held at the United Nations Office at Geneva should be successful, it was essential, even for private consultations, that the working documents should be translated into all the working languages, in accordance with the Board's rules of procedure. His delegation hoped that that would be the case for the fifth session of the Conference, and that all the necessary secretariat services would be provided.

64. Mr. [illegible] (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) stressed the difficulties arising from UNCTAD's very full calendar of meetings, particularly for countries whose permanent mission at Geneva was not a large one and whose representatives were therefore compelled to attend successive meetings without sufficient time for proper preparation. The Board should bear that question in mind and take the calendar of meetings already established into account when deciding on new meetings.

45. Insofar as documentation was concerned, the various working languages of UNCTAD should be on an equal footing. The Russian documents frequently appeared after the meeting for which they had been intended or at best during the meeting. The secretariat should therefore take urgent measures to remedy that situation. One of the solutions proposed had been a suggestion that the funds made available to the secretariat should be increased. That would be a vicious circle, as an increase in resources would result in an increase in the installed capacity and, consequently, in the volume of documentation. Another solution would be to improve efficiency and quality by using the same resources in a more productive way, for example by limiting the volume of documentation and ensuring that the same data were not reproduced in several documents. While paying tribute to the secretariat, he observed that delegations were often unable, for lack of time, thoroughly to read the documents provided by the secretariat. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD should join with the secretariat in considering all the suggestions made to the Board and put forward suggestions at the following session.

(e) DESIGNATION AND CLASSIFICATION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE PURPOSES OF RULE 79 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE BOARD (TD/B/L.16 and Add.1-3; TD/B/727)

46. The PRESIDENT said that eight non-governmental organizations had asked to be designated and classified for the purposes of rule 79 of the rules of procedure of the Board. In accordance with established practice, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD had consulted the Bureau of the Board, which had concurred with the recommendations contained in document TD/B/727. If there was no objection, he would consider that the Board approved the recommendations contained in the note by the secretariat (TD/B/727).

47. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.